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The Price of Freedom



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Chapter 1 by Jenny Neill

I hopped off of the bus and twirled home, my long black hair spraying from my scalp like a sprinkler, and I knew he was watching me.

It gave me a warm fuzzy feeling in the pit of my stomach... and I loved it. It was a feeling that I craved so much.

I ran up to the three-story, columned house and unlocked the door.

"Anyoung, Umma!" I yell out in greeting to my mother. The house is silent.

I remember. Mother is gone.

Most people may be sad and sorrowful that their mother is gone, but I couldn't have felt more relieved. My mother was always loud, abusive, and cruel. She was an obsessive control freak; she insisted that I master every instrument that came to her mind.

I enjoy a few instruments that I play, when she's gone. I love the cello for sad songs, because it feels like I'm hugging someone, and I like violin for happy songs, because they are chirpy and I can dance while I play them.

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Right then when I got home, my mother would have made me practice the piano until my fingers bruised, then the violin until they bled. Then the viola, cello, bass, drums, harp, and then the piano again until I went to bed at 10 pm. That was only even days. On odd days it was piano, oboe, clarinet, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, tenor sax, baritone sax, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, french horn, euphonium, tuba, then piano again. Those nights I sometimes wouldn't sleep until 12.

She would beat me when I messed up, and my life was so stressful. I would cry and paint over my bruises and scars with makeup...

But that doesn't matter. She's gone now.

I run into the foyer...

And kick off my brown boots.

Mother would have whipped me.

I felt so REBELLIOUS.

I giggled to myself and danced around the house in my knee-high white socks. I peeled off my tan sweater and unbuttoned the button-shirt that I was wearing. I ran into my room and slipped on a Yo-Yo Ma shirt that I wore as pajamas. My skirt also came off as I put on leggings.

I was utterly relaxed.

Although something felt off. I could feel my scabbed-over fingertips singing, ACHING to play.

I consented to them because I was in a good mood and I felt the need to vent into something.

I picked up the violin and began my favorite happy tune, "Flight of the Bumblebee", a fast-paced song that made me dance. I swerved all over the house as I played, like a race car.

I played the violin for maybe 30 minutes, looked at the clock and it was 3:45. So much TIME all for ME! I squealed happily.

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I was thirsty, so I ran into the kitchen and got a glass of water. I looked at myself in the mirror. My brown-almost-black eyes sparkled at this glorious day.

Then I froze as I saw my long hair.

I never wanted long hair. It was so much WORK, and it made my already-stressful life so much harder. But...

But mother was gone, and she wasn't coming back. Ever.

Cocky rebellion twinkled in my dark eyes as I walked into the kitchen...

And walked out with a pair of gleaming scissors.

"Cham-eul suga eobs-eo," I cursed my almost-knee-length hair in my native tongue. I held the scissors like a knife and sliced, not caring how long it would be now.

I looked into the mirror at my now shoulder-length hair and smiled. I looked... I looked...

Beautiful! My eyes were so much more pronounced, and my hair texture complimented the new length. I laughed and smiled, overwhelmed with glee.

After that I dug through my mother's room for the wifi password. When I found it, I made a messaging account on my phone and talked to my friends from school. We talked for hours until my eyes hurt.

I looked at the clock. 6:00 pm. I decided that I would go eat WHILE reading (something my mother would have forbade).

Then I got out some pencils and printer paper, and I drew.

Well, doodled is more like it. I was never given a real sketchbook or supplies, and my mother was against art like that, so I never got to draw for real. I drew first cats and dogs, to get a feel. Then I moved on to people, then birds and dragons. My drawings were pretty terrible, but that night I decided to go to sleep at 8:00.

I wanted to sleep in the living room so I could be a part of the fun, although it was unlikely because our house was heavily guarded.

Not our house. MY house.

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I grabbed a dark-blue duvet and curled up on the plush couch, my hair stroking my bare shoulders. I closed my eyes, but the house was eerily quiet. It dawned on me that my mother always played the piano until late, after I'd fallen asleep.

That's when I began to cry. I didn't miss her-- not in the slightest-- but something felt off. I shivered as my cold tears on my shoulders. I wasn't even sobbing, so it was kind of cryptic and odd. My tears strolled down my face fast, never-ending, never slowing down. Just a constant stream of tears.

Minutes later, a lump rose up in my throat and I began to sob. Quietly at first, but it began to get louder, like a crescendo. I laughed while sobbing at my nerd-ness. I was so obsessed with music that even my similes revolved around them. I sobbed so loudly at my freedom, at my new availability of choices. I could do whatever I wanted... I could make my own routine.

I continued to cry, for whatever reason, and cursed loudly at my mother in Korean, "IS THIS WHAT YOU WANTED?!" I sobbed. "DID YOU WANT ME TO BE TORN UP OVER YOU?! YOU KNOW THAT I NEVER LOVED YOU, NOT LIKE I WAS SUPPOSED TO! YOU KNOW THAT I ALWAYS WISHED YOU WOULD DIE! BUT NOW THAT YOU'RE GONE..." my voice cracked as I rubbed my face, the tears staining them. "NOW THAT YOU'RE GONE I KNOW THAT YOU WON'T EVER BE BACK FOR ME..." I sobbed again. "...AND I. CAN'T. TAKE. IT!" I pounded my fist against the wall with each word. She was the DEVIL to me, I should've hated her, I DID hate her...

I yelled at her again, wherever she was, "AM I YOUR TOY?!" I grabbed an object off of the end table and chucked it at the mirror above the fireplace. "DID YOU PLAN THIS? DID YOU PLAN ME?! A CRAZY, CRAZY GIRL, talking to her gone mother..." I sobbed again and again.

That's when it struck me that people fear freedom because freedom promises isolation. To be free, you must also accept that you will be alone. I couldn't kill myself, because I didn't want to see her, not in a million years.

So I sobbed into my hands instead.

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Chapter 2 by New Blue City

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It was ten fifty nine, now c
Instrument, any
Instrument. I tossed and turned on the couch. My wretched deceased mother- getting me

addicted to playing music. I would resist it. I had to, had to stay sane. I don't even like playing music that much, I could live without practicing any more for ONE day.

Maybe I wasn't addicted to music, though. Maybe, I just liked listening to it and playing it. It is not like I saw music in every object in my house like mathematicians or anything. It is not like every sound makes me feel like playing music... Or does it?

I thought about nails on a chalk board. Giving into my brain as it lead me over to the piano and I began to play a sad melody, then my cello, then the violin. I had created a beautiful symphony of sounds- showing how I felt about sounds insulting to the ear. All that was left was to write it down.

Pick up a pencil and draw a musical score on the paper. *Just pick up the pencil. Draw four, simple lines. It's what you want to do.* Maybe I am meant to be a composer. My mother never wished that for me aloud- I would be choosing my own path. I could portray how each instrument is free. How they all work together to create the perfect melody. To describe something in perfect detail through sound and let the rhythm flow throughout my body and.....

No, this wasn't me. I wanted to go back to sleep. I wanted to leave music and have a different life. One where I can live in complete freedom. No one tells me what to do, no one gives me bruises, nothing is forced. A life where everything comes naturally.

I fell back onto my couch- falling into a restless sleep. Having nightmares about how I will keep this a secret, my mother becoming the death of me, how I can get food and a job, her ghost influencing my thoughts, the music coming to get revenge for me leaving it.....

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